



## CELL Exhibit Lesson Pre Lesson al-Qaeda/ISIS

**Lesson Title:** Understanding International Terrorism and Religious Extremism: al- Qaeda and ISIS

**Grade Level:** 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade is our target audience; occasionally 8th grade

**Duration:** 60 minutes

**Content Area:** Pre lesson for al-Qaeda and ISIS CELL Exhibit Tour

**Standards Content Area:** History, Geography, Civic Engagement, and Reading, Writing and Communicating

### Overview:

This lesson provides students with a foundational understanding of international terrorism, focusing on al-Qaeda and ISIS as case studies. Through scenario analysis and group discussions, students will explore the geographic hotspots of extremist violence, the role of religious extremism as a motivator for terrorist activity, and the ongoing global threats posed by these Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs). This lesson is designed as a pre-visit activity to the CELL exhibit, preparing students to critically engage with real-world examples of terrorism and its impacts.

### Learning Objectives:

In this lesson, students will:

- Define terrorism and Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs), and describe common tactics used by groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS.
- Identify key geographic regions impacted by extremist violence and explore contributing political, economic, and social factors.
- Analyze the impact of terrorist attacks on individuals, communities, and international security.
- Explore how religious extremism drives the ideology and actions of terrorist groups.

### Essential Questions:

- Factual:
  - What is terrorism, and how are Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) like al-Qaeda and ISIS defined and classified?
  - What tactics do terrorist organizations commonly use to carry out attacks?
  - Where are al-Qaeda and ISIS currently active, and what evidence supports their presence in those regions?
- Conceptual:
  - How do extremist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS use their tactics to influence communities and assert control?
  - How do the psychological and societal impacts of terrorism affect individuals and communities long after the attacks occur?

### Key Terms:

- **Terrorism:** The premeditated use of violence or the threat of violence targeting civilians or their property for political, religious, or ideological gain. It aims to create fear, chaos, and intimidation to further the perpetrators' objectives.



- **Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO):** A foreign organization that engages in terrorist activity, and whose actions threaten the security of U.S. nationals or national security, as designated by the U.S. Department of State.
- **Violent Extremism:** The support of violent acts to achieve political, religious, or ideological goals, often targeting specific groups of people.
- **Religious Extremism:** Refers to the belief in, and support for, extreme interpretations of religious doctrines that justify or promote violence to achieve religious or ideological goals.
- **Ideology:** A system of beliefs or ideals, especially one that forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy. In this context, it's the motivating force behind terrorist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda.

#### Materials:

- World map (digital or printed)
- Student handout with discussion prompts and reflection questions
- Scenario Cards

#### Lesson Activities: Total of 60 minutes

##### Activity 1: Understanding Terrorism, FTO's, and Strategies of Terrorism (10 minutes)

- On the note catcher, students answer: **What do you think makes an organization a terrorist group?**
  - Ask students to share out answers
  - Teacher shares CELL definition:
    - CELL Definition of Terrorism: Terrorism is the premeditated use of violence or the threat of violence targeting civilians or their property for political, religious or ideological gain. It is a tactic used to create an environment of fear, chaos and intimidation in order to further the terrorists' objectives.
    - Definition of FTO: A foreign organization that engages in terrorist activity, and the activity threatens the security of U.S. nationals, or the national security of the U.S. as categorized by the U.S. Department of State
- Students break into small groups and are given 2-3 scenario cards to determine if the act described on the card is terrorism or not
- Questions students will answer about each scenario are:
  - *Is this an example of terrorism? Why or why not?*
  - *How did the perpetrator carry out the attack, what tactics did they use?*
  - *Who/what group was the perpetrator?*

##### Scenario 1: The 2000 USS Cole Bombing

In October 2000, while refueling in Yemen's Aden harbor, the USS Cole, a U.S. Navy destroyer, was attacked by two Al-Qaeda suicide bombers in a small boat loaded with explosives. The powerful explosion created a massive hole in the ship's hull, killing 17 U.S. Navy sailors and injuring 39 others. Intelligence reports later confirmed that the operation was personally planned by Osama bin Laden and served as a precursor to the 9/11 attacks.

**Tactic:** Suicide bombing



**Foreign Terrorist Attack-** al-Qaeda is a transnational terrorist group targeting U.S. military assets

**Map Location:** Yemen's Aden Harbor

### **Scenario 2: The 1995 Tokyo Subway Sarin Attack**

In March 1995, members of Aum Shinrikyo, a Japanese doomsday cult, carried out a coordinated domestic terrorist attack by releasing sarin gas, a deadly nerve agent, on five subway trains in Tokyo, Japan. The attack killed 13 people, severely injured 50, and caused temporary vision problems for nearly 1,000 others.

Aum Shinrikyo was a Japan-based extremist group that sought to overthrow the government and establish a theocratic state under its leader, Shoko Asahara. Unlike foreign terrorist organizations, Aum Shinrikyo operated entirely within Japan, radicalizing members and executing large-scale attacks to instill fear and assert its power.

**Tactic:** Chemical attack

**Domestic Terrorist Attack-** This was a **domestic** terrorist attack as Aum Shinrikyo was a Japanese-based extremist group.

### **Scenario 3: The 1972 Munich Olympics Hostage Crisis**

During the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, West Germany, a Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) group, Black September, carried out a terrorist attack by taking 11 Israeli athletes hostage in the Olympic Village. The group demanded the release of 234 Palestinian and other prisoners held in Israeli jails.

This act of terrorism was orchestrated by Black September, a militant faction operating outside of Palestine, and supported by PLO elements, making it a foreign attack on German soil against Israeli nationals. The crisis ended tragically when a failed rescue attempt led to the deaths of all 11 hostages, along with five terrorists and a German police officer.

**Tactic:** Hostage-taking

**Foreign Terrorist Attack:** A Palestinian militant group attacking Israeli athletes on foreign soil to push their political agenda.

**Map Location:** Munich, West Germany

### **Scenario 4: The 2014 Chibok Schoolgirls Kidnapping**

In April 2014, Boko Haram, carried out a mass kidnapping of 276 female students from a secondary school in Chibok, Nigeria. Boko Haram, an Islamist extremist group affiliated with ISIS, has long opposed Western-style education, particularly for girls, viewing it as a threat to their radical ideology.

This act of terrorism was part of Boko Haram's broader campaign to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria and enforce strict Sharia law. The kidnapping gained international attention, leading to the viral #BringBackOurGirls movement, yet many victims remain missing.

**Tactic:** Mass kidnapping

**Foreign Terrorist Attack:** Boko Haram is designated as an FTO by the U.S. and operates in Nigeria and neighboring regions.

**Map Location:** Chibok, Nigeria

### **Scenario 5: The 1998 U.S. Embassy Bombings**



In August 1998, Al-Qaeda, carried out coordinated truck bombings at the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The attacks killed 224 people, including 12 Americans, and injured over 4,500 others.

The bombings were personally orchestrated by Osama bin Laden, marking a significant escalation in Al-Qaeda's global campaign against the United States. Intelligence reports confirmed that Al-Qaeda operatives had spent months surveilling the embassies, planning the attacks to coincide with morning work hours for maximum casualties.

These attacks demonstrated Al-Qaeda's ability to strike U.S. targets overseas, leading to U.S. missile strikes on Al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan and Sudan. The bombings also served as a precursor to the 9/11 attacks, solidifying Al-Qaeda's commitment to global jihad against the U.S. and its allies.

**Tactic:** Coordinated bombings

**Foreign Terrorist Attack:** al-Qaeda targeted U.S. embassies abroad as part of Al-Qaeda's global campaign against the U.S.

**Map Location:** Nairobi, Kenya & Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

#### **Scenario 6: The 2024 Moscow Concert Hall Attack**

In March 2024, four armed militants affiliated with ISIS-K (Islamic State – Khorasan Province) carried out a mass shooting and arson attack at Crocus City Hall, a concert venue in Moscow, Russia. The attack occurred during a packed event, resulting in 145 deaths and over 551 injuries, making it one of the deadliest terrorist incidents in Russia's modern history.

ISIS-K later claimed responsibility for the attack through its media outlet, Amaq News Agency, as part of its broader campaign against Russia.

**Tactic:** Mass shooting and arson

**Foreign Terrorist Attack:** ISIS-K targeted civilians in a high-profile venue, claimed responsibility for the attack and has previously expressed hostility toward Russia due to its military involvement in Syria and Central Asia.

**Map Location:** Moscow, Russia

#### **Scenario 7: The 2004 Madrid Train Bombings**

In March 2004, a series of ten coordinated bombings targeted commuter trains in Madrid, Spain, during morning rush hour, killing 193 people and injuring around 2,000. The attack was carried out by an Al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist cell.

The perpetrators were members of a jihadist network inspired and directed by Al-Qaeda, with connections to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and other extremist groups. Shortly after the attack, the terrorists claimed responsibility, citing Spain's military involvement in the Iraq War as justification. The bombings were intended to intimidate the Spanish government and influence public opinion ahead of national elections.

**Tactic:** Coordinated bombings

**Foreign Terrorist Attack** – Carried out by Islamist extremists linked to al-Qaeda

**Map Location:** Madrid, Spain

#### **Scenario 8: The 2013 Westgate Mall Attack**



In September 2013, gunmen from Al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda affiliate, launched a mass shooting attack on the Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi, Kenya. The siege lasted four days, resulting in 67 deaths and over 200 injuries.

Al-Shabaab, a Somalia-based extremist group, explicitly claimed responsibility for the attack, stating it was retaliation for Kenya's military intervention in Somalia as part of the African Union's counterterrorism efforts against the group. The attackers specifically targeted non-Muslims, forcing hostages to prove their religious identity to spare their lives, a tactic consistent with Al-Qaeda's ideological framework.

**Tactic:** Mass shooting

**Foreign Terrorist attack:** Carried out by al-Shabaab

**Map Location:** Nairobi, Kenya

### **Scenario 9: The 1993 World Trade Center Bombing**

In February 1993, a truck bomb was detonated beneath the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City, killing six people and injuring over 1,000. The attack was orchestrated by an Islamist extremist cell linked to Al-Qaeda.

The bombing was planned and executed by Ramzi Yousef, who was trained in Al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The attackers intended to topple the North Tower into the South Tower, aiming to cause mass casualties and widespread destruction. The plot was financially and ideologically supported by foreign extremist networks, including figures later tied to Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda's global jihadist movement.

**Tactic:** Vehicular bombing

**Foreign Terrorist:** Yes, however the U.S. designation of FTO had not been established yet- so it was later classified based on the perpetrator's affiliation with the global jihadist movement.

**Map Location:** New York City, USA

### **Scenario 10: The 2002 Bali Bombings**

In October 2002, a series of coordinated bombings struck a popular tourist district in Bali, Indonesia, killing 202 people, including many foreign tourists from Australia, the U.S., and Europe, and injuring hundreds more. The attack was orchestrated by Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), an al-Qaeda affiliate in Southeast Asia.

Jemaah Islamiyah, which seeks to establish an Islamic caliphate across Southeast Asia, carried out the bombings with financial and operational support from al-Qaeda, making it a key foreign terrorist attack linked to global jihadist networks. The attackers used a suicide bomber inside a nightclub and a car bomb outside, maximizing casualties and destruction.

The attack was explicitly aimed at Western tourists, intending to damage Indonesia's economy, punish Western nations, and assert JI's role in Al-Qaeda's global jihad. Following the attack, international counterterrorism efforts intensified, leading to multiple arrests and the eventual weakening of JI's capabilities.

**Tactic:** Suicide bombing and car bombing

**Foreign Terrorist Attack:** Yes, carried out by Jemaah Islamiyah a Southeast Asian terrorist group lined to al-Qaeda.

**Map Location:** Bali, Indonesia



- Student groups give 10 second summary of one card to the group
- Wrap up
  - Discuss: What patterns did you notice in these examples?  
*\*Teacher tip- call out that many of these attacks had direct or indirect associations with al-Qaeda and ISIS.*

## Activity 2: Geographic Hotspots of Foreign Terrorist Organizations al-Qaeda and ISIS (15 minutes)

- Understanding FTO's, specifically al-Qaeda and ISIS today.
  - In small groups students will research an assigned region (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Kenya, Burkino Faso, Mali, Niger, Syria, Yemen, and Nigeria) to learn more about the activity associated with ISIS and al-Qaeda in that region. Answer the following questions:
    - What evidence shows that al-Qaeda, ISIS, or their affiliates are active in your assigned region?
      - *Consider attacks, recruitment, propaganda, or territorial claims.*
    - What local factors might be enabling terrorist activity in this region?
      - *Think about political instability, conflict history, poverty, or environmental challenges.*
    - Besides al-Qaeda and ISIS, are there any other extremist or terrorist groups operating in this area? If so, how are they similar to or different from al-Qaeda and ISIS?
      - *Proxies, competing or oppositional FTO's*
    - What are the core ideologies and goals of the terrorist groups in this region?
      - *Focus on al-Qaeda and ISIS—what do they believe, and what are they trying to achieve?*

*\*Teacher Tip: Suggested sources:*

- *Brookings Institute; <https://www.brookings.edu/topics/international-affairs/>*
  - *Council on Foreign Relations; <https://www.cfr.org/books-reports>*
  - *BBC News; <https://www.bbc.com/news>*
  - *Associated Press (AP)*
  - *Combating Terrorism Center (Westpoint); <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/>*
  - *Washington Institute for Near East Policy; <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/>*
- Exchange of information
  - Small groups will exchange their information with one other group and compare similarities and differences among the regions.
  - Optional: Exchange information with more groups if there is time
- Discussion:
  - What patterns or similarities do you notice in the goals and tactics of terrorist groups across different regions?
  - How do al-Qaeda and ISIS adapt their strategies to different local conditions?
  - Which regions appear to have the most concentrated terrorist activity, and why might that be the case?



### Activity 3: Examination of ISIS and al- Qaeda (5-7 minutes)

- Students will complete the 'What I know & what I want to know' chart on their handout in preparation for the CELL Exhibit Tour

	al- Qaeda	ISIS
<b>What I know</b> about why they perpetrate terrorist attacks...		
<b>What I want to know</b> about why they perpetrate terrorist attacks...		
<b>What I know</b> about the ideologies and why they drive these terrorist groups.		
<b>What I want to know</b> about the ideologies and why they drive these terrorist groups.		
<b>Additional questions I have ...</b>		

### Activity 4: Understanding the Impacts of Terrorism (20 Minutes)

- Still in small groups, students will read/view an excerpt from a primary source and complete the "Impacts of Terrorism" using a Venn Diagram:

#### Individual Impacts (e.g., loss of family, trauma)

- How do victims and their families suffer?
- Primary Resource: Ted Talk Gill Hicks  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/gill\\_hicks\\_i\\_survived\\_a\\_terrorist\\_attack\\_here\\_s\\_what\\_i\\_learned](https://www.ted.com/talks/gill_hicks_i_survived_a_terrorist_attack_here_s_what_i_learned) (10 minutes and 28 seconds)

#### Community Impacts (e.g., displacement, economic devastation)

- How is a local society/community affected?
- Primary Document: Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum Recovery: The Financial Impact of the Oklahoma City Bombing  
[https://memorialmuseum.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/okcnm-recovery-the-financial-impact.pdf?utm\\_source](https://memorialmuseum.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/okcnm-recovery-the-financial-impact.pdf?utm_source)
  - Specifically page 2, Community Assistance

#### National and Global Impacts (e.g., increased security measures, international alliances).

- How do governments and international organizations respond?



- Primary Document: Joint Resolution 115 STAT. 224  
<https://www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ40/PLAW-107publ40.pdf> (PUBLIC LAW 107–40—SEPT. 18, 2001)

- Students will share their findings regarding the group they examined and then discuss similarities and differences using the *Impacts of Terrorism Venn Diagram*

#### **Activity 5: Conclusion- Final Discussion or writing prompt options (10 minutes)**

- Students choose one of the reflection questions below and write a brief response (1-3 paragraphs) OR discuss in small groups. Students will draw connections from earlier in the lesson, such as specific terrorist attacks, tactics, or survivor stories in the reflection.
  - How has your understanding of what defines a terrorist group changed after analyzing different real-world scenarios?
  - What psychological tactics do terrorist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda use to spread fear and intimidation?
  - What similarities and differences did you notice in the strategies and tactics used by al-Qaeda, ISIS, and other extremist groups across different regions?
  - How do terrorist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda target not just individuals, but also a community's identity, institutions, and future stability?

#### **Standards:**

- Academic
  - SS22-GR.HS-S.1.2-GLE.2 – Analyze and evaluate key concepts of continuity and change, cause and effect, complexity, unity and diversity, and significant ideas in the United States from Reconstruction to the present.
  - SS22-GR.HS-S.3-GLE.3 – Investigate patterns of the interconnected nature of the world, its people, and places.
  - SS22-GR.HS-S.1.3-GLE.3- Analyze and evaluate key concepts of continuity and change, cause and effect, complexity, unity and diversity, and significant ideas throughout the world from the Renaissance to the present.
  - RW20-GR.H1-S.2-GLE.2- Understand the logical progression of ideas in increasingly complex texts.
  - RW20-GR.HS2-S.2-GLE.2 – Interpret and evaluate complex informational texts.
- Skills
  - Inquiry/Analysis: Recognize and describe cause-and-effect relationships and patterns in everyday experiences.
  - Global and Cultural Awareness: Compare attitudes and beliefs as an individual to others.
  - Use of Information and Communications Technologies: Find information through the use of technologies.